

BLACK MALE ENLISTMENT: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFRICAN  
AMERICAN MANHOOD AND BENEFITS/DISADVANTAGES OF ENLISTING INTO THE  
MILITARY

BY  
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THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the past few decades, enlistment rates for African American men have experienced a steady decline. Military experience is thought to be beneficial to African American individuals and communities by creating an up-springing foundation towards wellness. Historically, African American men have participated at high rates in every war in which America has been involved, until recent decades. Black men have been proud and willing to serve in the US military in hopes of receiving socioeconomic advancements and fair opportunities. The percentage of black male participation in the military is proportional to their representation the US population, while the percentage of black women serving in the military today is nearly double their representation in the United States. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between African American manhood and perspectives on enlistment into today's military. It was found that African American men who experience college value quality of life over service to country.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose

In 1863, Fredrick Douglass published articles entitled, “*Men of Color, To Arms!*” and “*Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?*”, both urging black Americans to overcome the degradation of slavery by joining the military. In his pursuit to recruit soldiers for black regiments, Douglass lists nine reasons to which colored men should enlist:

“First. You are a man, although a colored man. Manhood requires you to take sides, and you are mean or noble according to how you choose between action and inaction. If color should not a criterion of rights, neither should it be a standard of duty. The whole duty of man belongs alike to white and black.

Second. You are however, not only a man, but an American citizen, so declared by the highest legal adviser of the Government, and you have hitherto expressed in various ways, not only your willingness but your earnest desire to fulfil any and every obligation which the relation of citizenship imposes. Should you refuse to enlist now, you will justify the past contempt of the Government towards you and lead it to regret having honored you with a call to take up arms in its defense.

Third. A third reason why a colored man should enlist is found in the fact that every Negro-hater and slavery-lover in the land regards the arming of Negroes as a calamity and is doing his best to prevent it. In nine cases out of ten, you will find it safe to do just what your enemy would gladly have you leave undone.

Fourth. You should enlist to learn the use of arms, to become familiar with the means of securing, protecting and defending your own liberty. The only way open to any race to make their rights respected is to learn how to defend them. Enlist therefore, that you may learn the art and assert ability to defend yourself.

Fifth. You are a member of a long enslaved and despised race. You should enlist and disprove the slander and wipe out the reproach. When you shall be seen nobly defending the liberties of your own country against rebels and traitors—brass itself will blush to use such arguments imputing cowardice against you.

Sixth. Whether you are or are not, entitled to all the rights of citizenship in this country has long been a matter of dispute to your prejudice. By enlisting in the service of your country at this trial hour, and upholding the National Flag, you stop the mouths of traducers and win applause even from the iron lips of ingratitude.

Seventh. Enlist for your own sake. You owe it to yourself and your race to rise from your social debasement and take your place among the soldiers of your country, a man among men. He who fights the battles of America may claim America as his country—and have that claim respected.

Eighth. You should enlist because your doing so will be one of the most certain means of preventing the country from drifting back into the whirlpool of Pro-Slavery Compromise at the end of the war, which is now our greatest danger. If you mean to live in this country now is the time for you to do your full share in making it a country where you and your children after you can live in comparative safety.

Ninth. You should enlist because the war for the Union, whether men so call it or not, is a war for Emancipation. Enlist, and deserve not only well of your country, and win for yourselves, a name and a place among men, but secure to yourself what is infinitely more precious, the fast dropping tears of gratitude of your kith and kin marked out for destruction, and who are but now ready to perish.” (Fredrick Douglass, 1863)

These are only abbreviations of Douglass’s reasons in which colored men should enlist into the US military. Having encouraged many colored men, Douglass’s articles contributed to the enlistment of upwards of 180,000 black troops by convincing them that there was no better service to the cause of colored people than serving their country for the advancement of their people.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the relationship between African American manhood and perspectives on enlistment into today’s military. This research aims to study the benefits and/or disadvantages for black men of being either pro-enlistment or anti-enlistment. This study also aims to address the roles of black males within their community and American society today.

### **Research Question**

The guiding research question for this study is: What is the relationship between manhood, community, and enlistment for African American men in efforts to advance the agenda of racial equality in American society?

### **Subsidiary Questions**

1. Which variables (old or new) have influenced the decline of black male participation in the armed forces?
2. Do black men feel misplaced/forgotten in their communities?

## **Hypothesis**

I hypothesize health agenda dynamics are variables contributing to declining rates of African American male participation in the US military. The hypotheses that are assumed within this study are the following:

1. Targeted systematic obstructions have demotivated and limited opportunity for black men to participate in service to their communities.
2. Health and wellness for African American men will affect decisions for enlistment preferences.

## **1.2 Significance**

The military depends more on public opinion than many other governmental agencies (Leal, 2005). The military experiences of African Americans as individuals and as a community are largely thought to have had a positive impact (Leal, 2005). In particular, military service has been a key source of socioeconomic mobility for black Americans. Blacks occupy more management positions in the military than they do in business, education, journalism, government, or any other significant sector of American workplaces (Ellison, 1992). Today, blacks serve in the Army at a rate higher than their representation in the US population (Maxfield, 2010). In terms of gender, there is a higher percentage of black females in the active-duty Army than black males. This higher representation of females is true for commissioned officers, warrant officers, and enlisted soldiers (Maxfield, 2010). Until recent decades, black men have been proud and willing to serve in the military in hopes of receiving socioeconomic advancements and fair opportunities. Historically, there are many documented cases in which black men who served their country in the military enhanced their ability to push forward the agenda of racial equality, resulting in long-lasting societal impacts. In the course of this service and social activism, blacks have evolved as human beings and as leaders.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Wellness involves being aware of oneself as a whole person, including a sense of balance and contentment. It is the belief that humans need meaningful relationships and a sense of purpose. Wellness is a conscious, deliberate process that requires being aware of and making choices for a more satisfying lifestyle. Stress, addiction, trauma, disappointment, and loss can impact wellness and balance in life (Swarbrick & Yoduf, 2015). This study uses The Wellness Wheel as a model to examine African American male choices about enlistment opinions in the military.

The Wellness Wheel used to examine African American male perspectives consists of eight dimensions: emotional, financial, social, spiritual, occupational, physical, intellectual, and environmental. Each dimension of wellness can affect one's overall quality of life, because wellness directly relates to the length and quality of one's life (Swarbrick & Yoduf, 2015). This multi-dimensional model illustrates the idea that all eight dimensions are inter-connected to fulfill the wholeness of human beings.

### **1.3 Definitions and Terms**

**African American** - an American having African and especially black African ancestors.

**Male** - a person bearing an X and Y chromosome pair in the cell nuclei and normally having a penis, scrotum, and testicles, and developing hair on the face at adolescence; a boy or man.

**Quality of life (QOL)** - the general well-being of a person or society, defined in terms of health and happiness, rather than wealth.

**Emotional** - coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships.

**Environmental** - good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being.

**Financial** - satisfaction with current and future financial situations.



**Intellectual** - recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills.

**Occupational** - personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work.

**Physical** - recognizing the need for physical activity, healthy foods, and sleep.

**Social** - developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system.

**Spiritual** - expanding a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

#### **1.4 Assumptions**

The following assumptions can be made about the collection of information and examination of military perspectives.

1. Participants provided information to the best of their knowledge.
2. Participants consented to the use of the information they provided.
3. Participants information is truthful.
4. Participants confidentiality is upheld.
5. Participants involvement is voluntary.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Empowerment in Military Service**

One of the most remarkable aspects of the often painful and incredibly complicated story of blacks in this country is that they have remained loyal to concepts of freedom and democracy even when they have the most marginal beneficiaries of the very ideals they defend (Bolden & Buckley, 2003). Their loyalty has proven to be a source of strength not merely to the nation but also as blacks who committed themselves to American ideals, even if the promise of those ideals remained elusive in their own lives (Bolden & Buckley, 2003). Throughout most of American history, blacks have never ceased trying to claim their birthright. Given that so much has been taken from them and so little given in return, there is something enduring and powerful about their role in American history (Bolden & Buckley, 2003).

Loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage are terms exemplified throughout military leadership (ARMY.MIL Features, n.d). Leaders are not average people. Leadership involves having the courage, character, and confidence to enter into the unknown and create value for others (Boss, 2016). Many veterans acknowledge having experiences in their service that involved gaining and displaying influential leadership. Throughout their term of service, enlistees are immersed in leading by example, living by the Golden Rule, leading with forgiveness, leading with recognition, leading with connection, serving with mentorship and always remembering that the mission is more important than the individual (Admin, 2015). Purpose defines who people are as an individual and as a community. If an individual doesn't live up to the purpose that defines them as a leader then they will lose the war of "relevance." (Boss, 2016).

In 1866, an Act of Congress created all-black peacetime regiments, the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, who became known as "The Buffalo Soldiers" (The

Proud Legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers, 2018). The Buffalo Soldiers supported the nation's westward expansion by protecting settlers, building roads and other infrastructure, and guarding the US mail. Taking part in most of the military campaigns during the decades long Indian Wars, the Buffalo Soldiers compiled distinguished service records, including recipients of the Medal of Honor. Their exceptional performance paved the way for the first African-American to graduate from West Point Military Academy (The Proud Legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers, 2018). The Buffalo Soldiers served as some of the first National Park Rangers, played a key role in maintaining border security during the high-intensity military conflict along the US-Mexico border during the Mexican Revolution, and took part in defusing the little-known 1892 Johnson County War in Wyoming. In the face of discrimination, repressive laws, and fierce combat, these proud African American soldiers exhibited remarkable courage (The Proud Legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers, 2018).

Charles Young was born into slavery on March 12, 1864. His father Gabriel fled to freedom in 1865 and enlisted as a private in the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, US Colored Heavy Artillery (Borch, 2013). Impressed by his father's status of "Grand Army man," Charles attended West Point US Military Academy in 1884. He became the ninth black American admitted into West Point and would become only the third to graduate with a commission, as a second lieutenant (Borch, 2013). During his time as a servicemember, Young was recognized for many achievements. He became the first African American National Park Superintendent, the first Military Attaché to Haiti and the Dominican Republic on the island of Hispaniola, the first African American to achieve the rank of Colonel, and the second recipient of the Joseph Spingarn Medal. Young died in 1922 (Borch, 2013), and his goodwill and sheer force of character in his later years earned further honors. In 1999, Young was added to the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame, and in 2013, President Barack Obama used the 2013

Antiquities Act to designate Young's house in Wilberforce, Ohio as the "Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument," which is now part of the National Parks system (Colonel Charles Young, 2019).

Benjamin O. Davis Sr. was born on July 1, 1877. Davis began his education at the integrated Lucretia Mott elementary school, where a Civil War veteran led both black and white children in military drills during recess (Bielakowski, 2018). Encouraged by his drill instructor, Davis joined the District of Columbia National Guard in 1898 as a second lieutenant, later to be promoted to brigadier general by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration in 1940 (Bielakowski, 2018). As the first African American general in the US military, Davis became an inspirational figure in the African American press. He publicized African American combat achievements and developed educational programs to improve military race relations (Bielakowski, 2018). In becoming a brigadier general, Davis was able to use his platform to advocate for the racial integration of the armed forces.

Daniel "Chappie" James Jr. was born on February 11, 1920. As a Tuskegee Airman, James trained and served during World War II. James was the US Air Force's first African American four-star general (Gen. Daniel "Chappie" James Jr., 2015). James's importance transcends his achievements as a black in the military. His role as a spokesman for the American community helped dramatically change the status of blacks in his lifetime (McGovern, 1985). James genuinely appealed to blacks and attracted whites because he subscribed to traditional American values. A mayor in a southern city, speaking on behalf of black moderates, claimed that "After [Martin Luther] King he was the best hero we had" (McGovern, 1985). James was one of the most important advocates for social improvement for blacks through education, training and the pursuit of personal excellence, long before the Reverend Jesse Jackson began to emphasize the same goals (McGovern, 1985).

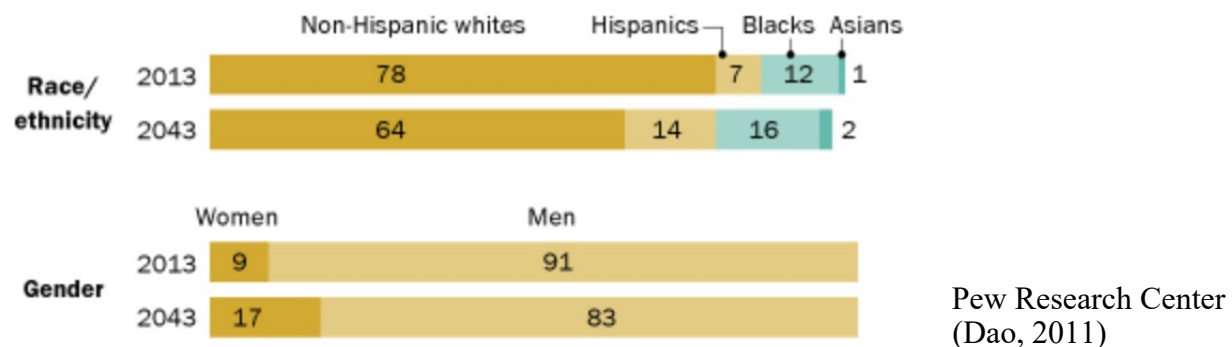
The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American soldiers to successfully complete their training and enter the Army Air Corps (Army Air Forces). Almost 1000 aviators were produced as America's first African American military pilots (The Tuskegee Airmen, n.d.). The success of the Tuskegee Airmen proved to the American public that African Americans, when given the opportunity, could become effective leaders. Modeled on the professionalism of Benjamin O. Davis and Daniel “Chappie” James, their performance helped to pave the way for desegregation of the military, which began with Executive Order 9981, issued by President Harry S. Truman in 1948 (The Tuskegee Airmen, n.d.). The Tuskegee Airmen’s success also helped to set the stage for civil rights advocates to continue the struggle to end racial discrimination. Through legal attacks on the system of segregation and techniques of nonviolent direct action aimed at segregation in the military, members of the 477th Bombardment Group helped set the precedent for direct action protests that became popular with civil rights activists in later decades (The Tuskegee Airmen, n.d.). These individuals show that service to the US military has provided many avenues for the advancement of colored people, especially for African American men pursuing a greater quality of life.

## **2.2 Demographics**

There are four branches of the US military: the Army, the Marine Corps, the Navy, and the Air Force. With nearly half a million members, the army is the largest service (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). Aggregately, the armed forces are younger than the civilian population. Most members of the military come from middle-class neighborhoods from across the United States (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). The United States ended the draft for military service in 1973, transitioning to the all-volunteer force that exists today. Since 1973, when the United States military ended conscription and established an all-volunteer force, the number of women serving on active duty has risen dramatically (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018).

It is predicted that between 2013 and 2043, the percentage of all veterans who are women will almost double, from nine percent to seventeen percent. The same Pew Research survey also predicts the share of veterans who are men will be reduced from ninety-one percent to eighty-three percent (Livingston, 2016). Mirroring trends in the overall US population, the veteran population is also predicted to become more racially and ethnically diverse. It is predicted that the overall Black population in the military will increase from twelve percent to sixteen percent (Livingston, 2016).

Figure 2.1



Demographic data collected by the Department of Defense also found that black women are enlisting into the military at far higher rates than black men. Black women represent nearly thirty-one percent of the female enlisted population, twice their percentage in the civilian female population. Black men represent approximately sixteen percent of the male enlisted population, roughly equal to their proportion of the civilian population (Dao, 2011). The reasons why black women enlist at higher rates than black men have not been extensively studied. Beth J. Asch, a senior economist and defense manpower specialist at the Rand Corporation, suggests that the military targets high school graduates who are looking for job training, good benefits, and help with college tuition, and that a high percentage of black women fit that bill (Dao, 2011).

### 2.3 Societal Implications

Despite holding high aspirations to attend college, black men comprised less than six percent of

the entire US undergraduate population in 2010 (Eunyoung, 2013). The number of baccalaureate degrees earned by black females in 2010 was approximately twice that of black males (66% vs 34%, respectively), a gap not reflected in other racial groups (Eunyoung, 2013). Additional evidence shows that almost seventy percent of black men do not complete a college degree within six years, compared with fifty-seven percent of the overall undergraduate population (Eunyoung, 2013). The imbalances between black men and black women show up at Predominantly White Institutions and community colleges as prominently as they do on Historically Black Campuses (Roach, 2001). Growing gaps between the participation of black men and black women in higher education are leading to a pronounced imbalance between the number of black men and black women who are college-educated, altering the social dynamics of the black community (Roach, 2001).

Prior research, using data collected with the Youth Attitude Tracking Survey (YATS) and the Army Communications Objectives Measurement System, showed that family background and demographic factors have an impact on military plans and enlistment (Bachman et al, 2000). Research also showed that social background, academic experiences, and vocational choices made during high school years had significant influences on enlistment. African American men face many socio-cultural and academic limitations that generate stressful experiences and identity conflicts that are unique to them as a group. Denigrations to their manhood have created stressors that in turn have prevented African American men from expressing their full potential as men and human beings (Bridges, 2010).

As African American boys develop, they become aware of the inequities that exist in American society (Bridges, 2010). African American males see that European Americans, particularly European American males, are treated with reverence and respect, while African American males are feared and have limited opportunities (Bridges, 2010). In academic settings, African American males are placed in remedial and special education classes at a greater rate

than European Americans or African American females. Given this absence of positive feedback, African American males have tended to develop a sense of pessimism towards the future (Bridges, 2010).

Phinney, Lockner, and Murphy (1990) suggest that African American males need to resolve two primary issues or conflicts that stem from their status as members of a marginalized group in American society. First, African American males must resolve prejudicial attitudes from society. Second, African American males must adopt two differing sets of values: one from the dominant culture, and one from their own culture (Phinney et al., 1990). African American males must struggle with adopting two divergent value systems, one African American and the other European American (Corbin & Pruitt, 1997). If African American males exclusively identify with Eurocentric values, including individualism, competitiveness, emotional suppression, and dominance, they may achieve success at the cost of being isolated from the African American community and alienated psychologically from their identity as persons of African descent (Corbin & Pruitt, 1997).

For African American males who resolve the ethnic identity issue described above, there are a number of possible outcomes: alienation, assimilation, withdrawal, and integration (Bridges, 2010). Bridges' research suggests that alienated individuals are those who accept the negative image that society presents and alienate themselves from the African American community and culture, assimilated individuals are those who attempt to become part of the majority culture and do not remain connected with the African American community, withdrawn individuals are those who become immersed in their own culture while withdrawing from contact with the dominant culture, and integrated individuals are those who find a way of accepting their African American ethnic identity while integrating with the dominant culture (Bridges, 2010).



## 2.4 Eight-Dimensional Wellness Wheel Model

The term wellness has been applied in many ways. Because there are different views on what encompasses wellness, the National Wellness Institute--along with the help of leaders in the health and wellness field--provides many interpretations and models of wellness (The Six Dimensions of Wellness, n.d.). Wellness is an active process through which individuals become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence (The Six Dimensions of Wellness, n.d.). Wellness is a holistic integration of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, fueling the body, engaging the mind, and nurturing the spirit (Stoewen, 2017). Although it always includes striving for health, it is more about living life fully, and can be described as “a lifestyle and a personalized approach to living life in a way that... allows you to become the best kind of person that your potentials, circumstances, and fate will allow,” (Stoewen, 2017).

Wellness necessitates good self-stewardship, both for the individual and for those who care for and are cared about by the individual (Stoewen, 2017). Focusing on wellness builds resilience and enables individuals to thrive amidst life’s challenges. It is an ongoing process that involves personal time and commitment (The Six Dimensions of Wellness, n.d.). Several wellness models exist. Dr. Bill Hettler, co-founder of the National Wellness Institute, is credited with developing the six-dimensional model of wellness in 1976

(<http://www.theeight.org/aboutus/8dimensionsofwellness.html>), (The Six Dimensions of Wellness, n.d.). The six dimensional holistic model explains multiple factors of wellness: how a person contributes to their environment and community to build better living spaces and social networks; the enrichment of life through work, and its interconnectedness to living and playing; the development of belief systems, values, and world-view; the benefits of regular physical activity, healthy eating habits, strength and vitality as well as personal responsibility and self-care; self-esteem, self-control, and determination as a sense of direction; creative and stimulating

mental activities and sharing your gifts with others (The Six Dimensions of Wellness, n.d.).

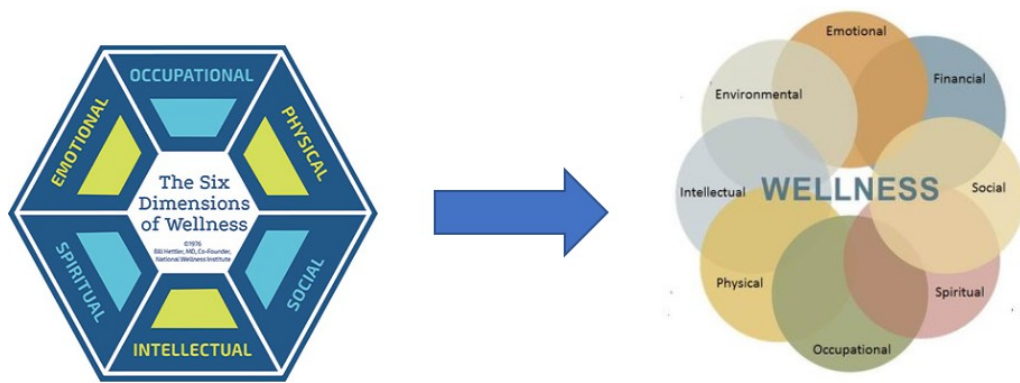
Wellness is an ever-evolving process which allows for newer interactions between other dimensional factors. Originally the wellness model consisted of six concepts: occupational, physical, social, intellectual, spiritual and emotional (The Six Dimensions of Wellness, n.d.).

The occupational dimension recognizes personal satisfaction and enrichment in one's life through work. At the center of occupational wellness is the premise that occupational development is related to one's attitude about one's work. Occupational wellness is improved by choosing a career which is consistent with one's personal values, interests, and beliefs rather than one that is unrewarding (National Wellness Institute, n.d.). The physical dimension recognizes the need for regular physical activity. Physical development involves learning about diet and nutrition while discouraging the use of tobacco, drugs and excessive alcohol consumption. Physical wellness is concerned with enhancing good health rather than impairing it (National Wellness Institute, n.d.). The social dimension encourages contributions to one's environment and community. It emphasizes the interdependence between others and nature. Social wellness is improved by contributing to the common welfare of one's community, rather than think only of oneself while living in harmony with the environment and others (National Wellness Institute, n.d.).

The intellectual dimension recognizes the importance of an individual's creative or stimulating mental activities. A well person expands his or her knowledge and skills while discovering the potential for sharing his or her gifts with others. Intellectual wellness includes challenging one's mind with intellectual and creative pursuits rather than becoming self-satisfied and unproductive (National Wellness Institute, n.d.). The spiritual dimension recognizes the desire to seek meaning and purpose in human existence. It includes the development of an appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and the natural forces that exist in the universe.

Spiritual wellness involves living each day in a way that is consistent with one's values and beliefs, as opposed to doing otherwise and feeling untrue to oneself and to be tolerant of the beliefs of others rather becoming closeminded and intolerant (National Wellness Institute, n.d.). The emotional dimension prioritizes awareness and acceptance of one's feelings. Emotional wellness includes the degree to which one feels positive and enthusiastic about one's self and life. It includes the capacity to manage one's feelings and related behaviors, including the realistic assessment of one's limitations, the development of autonomy, and the ability to cope effectively with stress. Emotional wellness involves being aware of and accepting of feelings rather than denying them, and being optimistic, rather than pessimistic, in approaching life (National Wellness Institute, n.d.).

Figure 2.2



*Source: National Wellness Institute*

*Source: Swarbrick & Yodanis, (2015)*

Since its original inception, the wellness model has gained two additional dimensions: financial and environmental. This eight-dimensional model was developed in 2012 by University Health Service at the University of Michigan and the National Wellness Institute (<http://www.theeight.org/aboutus/8dimensionsofwellness.html>). The environmental dimension includes understanding how one's social, natural, and built environments affect health and well-being, being aware of the unstable state of the earth and the effects of one's daily habits on the

physical environment and demonstrating commitment to a healthy planet. The financial dimension includes managing resources within means, making informed financial decisions and investments, setting realistic goals, preparing for short-term and long-term needs or emergencies, and being aware that everyone's financial values, needs, and circumstances are unique (Stoewen, 2017).

Making the right choices for health and well-being can be challenging. Attention must be given to all the dimensions, as neglect of any one over time will adversely affect the others, and ultimately one's health, well-being, and quality of life. The dimensions do not, however, need to be equally balanced (Stoewen, 2017). The aim is to strive for a sense of "personal harmony" that feels most authentic to each individual (University of Maryland, n.d.). Each individual will naturally have her or his own priorities, approaches, and aspirations, including her or his own idea of what it means to live life fully. Wellness is a dynamic, ever-changing, fluctuating process (Stoewen, 2017).

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

For this study, approval was needed from the University of Illinois Institution Review Board (IRB). This study was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The data was collected using interviews among the male African American population at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC). The data was audio-recorded.

### **3.1 Subjects**

Criteria for inclusion involved participants aged 18-27. Subjects must have self-identified as being both African American and male. Participants were required to be actively enrolled at the University of Illinois as a full-time or part-time student. Subjects were required to be members of Registered Student Organizations (RSOs). Members of these organizations are normally engaged in service projects within their communities. Participants were also required to be in good academic standing with the university. Data collection was based on information shared publicly during the interview process. Information collected pertained to participants' views on military enlistment and individual wellness.

### **3.2 Instrument**

The research instrument utilized for data collection was face-to-face focus group interviews. The subjects were interviewed for approximately 1 ½ hours (90 minutes). Focus groups are useful to obtain detailed information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions. Focus groups also may provide a broader range of information than other collection methods.

The information collected in this study was focused on the eight components of wellness, wellness's effects on manhood, and male opinions about military enlistment. The interview was an open forum, and interview questions were asked simultaneously to the group of participants.

Each subject participated in a nonjudgmental environment. For confidentiality purposes, subjects were identified by numbered name tags.

**Table 1** provides the questions asked over the course of the interview. Questions were divided into categories that served as a guide to engage subject participation in an open dialect environment. In answering questions, subjects responded individually for the demographic category to confirm their willingness to participate.

Table 1

**Focus Group Questions**

A. Demographics

1. For the purpose of interview procedures, can you please state your number?
2. Can you please state your age?
3. What is your marital status? (Married; Divorced; Never Married)
4. Do you have dependents? (Yes; No; If yes, how many?)
5. What is the size of your household?
6. Are you a first-generation college student? (Yes; No)
7. Are you a full-time or part-time student?
8. What is your year in school?
9. Do you plan to attend graduate school?
10. Are you a United States Veteran?
11. Are you a child or grandchild of a United States Veteran?

B. Questions

1. Emotional wellness involves coping effectively with life. Are you concerned that in enlisting you would lose control in your ability to find happiness and balance in life?

2. Environmental wellness involves environments that support well-being. Are you concerned that being placed in a hostile environment would impact both your emotional and physical health?
3. Financial wellness involves satisfaction with current and future financial situations. Do you have concerns that the military would not be able to provide you with enough finances to meet your lifestyle needs?
4. Intellectual wellness recognizes creative capabilities and findings ways to expand knowledge. In what ways do you think the military would restrict your intellectual growth?
5. Occupational wellness involves personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work. Is soldiering your only understating of the military as an occupation? What concerns do you have that the military will limit you occupational chooses in the labor market?
6. Physical wellness involves recognizing the need for physical activity, healthy foods and sleep. Becoming physically fit for the military involves cardiovascular training, strength training and maintaining a healthy diet. In your opinion does the military develop healthy lifestyle habits?
7. Social wellness involves developing a sense of connection and a well-developed support system. As a black male in the United States, have you gathered a sense of belonging in American society or are you coping with displacement? Does this have an effect on your view of the military?
8. Spiritual wellness involves seeking a purpose and a meaning to life. Do you believe that membership in the military would allow you to achieve a place of solitude, self-reflection, spiritual growth and connection with nature?

### **3.3. Procedures**

Prior to the interview process, the following protocol was adhered to. All subjects were required to provide a university-issued student identification card as well as confirm their consent to participate by signing the IRB-approved consent form. Before the interview commenced, the following procedures were followed:

1. A location with reduced distraction and familiar to subjects was agreed upon.
2. The purpose of the study was explained to the subjects prior to the interview process.
3. Conformation that anonymity is preserved.
4. Format and approximate time allotment of the study were explained to the participants.
5. Interviewer contact information was provided to all participants.
6. Subjects were allowed to add to guided questions as well as to ask questions to clarify misunderstandings.
7. Subjects were allowed to conclude the interview at any time.
8. An audio recorder was activated prior to the commencement of the interview.

During the interview process, the following questions were asked as part of the data collection process:

- a. Age: Participants were asked to state their age in years. The information was stated by the subjects individually and recorded during the interview process.
- b. Marital Status and Household: Participants were asked to state their marital status, dependent status, and size of household.
- c. Education: Participants were asked to state their student status.
- d. Military status: Participants were asked to state their affiliation with the military.



### **3.4 Data Analysis**

As previously stated, all statements given by the participants were digitally audio recorded and transcribed afterwards by the researcher. The notes have been transcribed verbatim as they were stated by the participant. The open coding method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to identify and categorize topics. The transcriptions were examined in order to uncover common themes within the focus group interview. The data was analyzed using the inductive reasoning approach. This approach aims to generate meaning from the data set collected in order to identify patterns and relationships and to build a theory (Thomas, 2006). Inductive reasoning allows for dominant and/or significant findings when processing raw data (Thomas, 2006). During this process, the data was analyzed and compiled into topics in order to find common underlying themes. The researcher interpreted and identified patterns of data that suggest possible relationships within the data set.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

Demographic data shows that participant ages ranged between 21-26 years, with a median age of 24. All participants identified their marital status as having never been married. In terms of dependent status, 80% (n=4) of the participants identified as having zero dependents, while 20% (n=1) identified as having one or more dependents. Most participants 80% (n=4) identified as having a household size of one, while 20% (n=10) identified as having a household size of more than one. 60% (n=3) of the participants identified as first-generation college students, while 40% (n=2) identified as generational college students. In terms of enrollment status, most participants identified as fulltime students 80% (n=4), and 20% (n=1) identified as part-time students. The majority of participants year are undergraduate seniors (80%) (n=4), and the remaining are graduate students 20% (n=1). All participants reported having plans to attend graduate school. No participants identified as a United States Veteran. 40% (n=2) identified as being a child or grandchild of a veteran.

The interview questions assessed overall wellness in relation to the process of military enlistment. It was projected that black men tend to be less inclined to serve in the military due to their perceived displacement in America. The concept of displacement is derived from a shifting agenda of belonging to a single ideal, community, or organization. Wellness was assessed through eight components corresponding with the eight dimensions of the wellness wheel. In this study, findings suggested that black men pursuing higher education are more concerned with quality of life than sacrifice. The data reveals factors that impact major life decisions and might have distorted military views amongst the participants. The participants' responses will be integrated in order to make salient common findings amongst the focus group.

**Emotional wellness:** Participants appeared to understand the importance of emotion and coping effectively with life. Concerns with emotional wellness and happiness were intertwined with discussions of personal behaviors and the ability to adapt:

*“Yes. To balance my own urges which are sometimes deviant, I feel like that will be unacceptable in the military even though it is realistic. Also, I feel like people can abuse their power. It would be hard to have control over whatever I want to do, and who I want to be because I’m always being guided.”*

*“...the time I have to explore the things that make me happy, is very scarce. It will be hard trying to find a balance of happiness.”*

Participants suggest that a sense of perfectionism may devour the ability to cope with life effectively due to human error. Here, human error refers to vices which are unique to the individual. An organization such as the military may alter one’s personal development and stunt intrapersonal growth. The use of guidance is complex. Guidance can be an effective tool in developing young minds, but guidance can also hinder someone’s ability to examine their innermost life inquires. One participant says adaptability is necessary for survival:

*“I disagree, I feel like I kind of cope well within my environments. I feel like for someone who’s big on recreation and leisure the military provides avenues to cope well.”*

This participant suggests that adaptability within different environments is necessary. The military acts as a bridge in which an individual may expand environmental palates and enjoy a greater quality of life depending on one’s personal preference.

**Environmental wellness:** Participants’ attitude concerning environmental factors in the military had negative impacts on their willingness to enlist. Military environments are portrayed as threatening and as involving repeated exposure to traumatic events:

*“Most events that happen in the military, if we’re talking about actively serving in a combat area, those are traumatic events. If you repeat those traumatic events, I feel like it’s only natural that your emotional interest declines because you’re being taught to be cathartic, to be aggressive, and have an aggressive mindset, so that carries over.”*

Adaptability was brought up several times in the discussion of environmental wellness:

*“.... depending on your upbringing, I don’t know what being enlisted entails but growing up in the inner city of Chicago, in a household where it is hostile, I feel like you are able to adjust rapidly because you are already in that type of environment experiencing the same type of traumas.”*

The subtext of these statements is that environmental wellness and a person’s ability to cope emotionally are intertwined. The environment will play a vital role in wellness, including adaptability. Being raised in a hostile environment may offer a buffer when encountering further traumatic events.

**Financial wellness:** According to participants’ responses, attitudes towards financial success were not a major factor in deciding whether or not to enlist in the military. Participants agreed they would find financial security in the military:

*“I don’t think that would be a major concern for me financially. I feel like the military, if they don’t do anything else, they try to take care of veterans and those who are currently enlisted. I feel that minus the benefits and all that other stuff, you’re going to make money.”*

Financial insecurity may not be a significant determinant in considering enlistment. Subjects agree that the military provides enough resources for financial gain. The interview did not assess participants’ financial competency.

***Intellectual wellness:*** Subjects expressed their pessimism concerning their ability to recognize creative capabilities and expand their knowledge within the military. Although the military offers payment for school, intelligence reaches beyond school work, and participants expressed thinking that the full scope of intelligence would become limited in the military:

*“I think they might restrict it if it pertains to if a person tried to get more details or more in-depth into finding out more about the military and war and why they do certain things. Why are these people a threat? The military will probably restrict information about that because they want you to think a certain way, so you do certain things and react certain ways. If you have more information, you may go against that or stuff like that. I don’t think there will be an issue in pursuing higher education though.”*

One participant expressed concern about his ability to develop beyond knowledge and fears that he might lack self-development opportunities in the military:

*“For me I will say my biggest fear as far as intelligence goes for the military would be emotional intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. I feel like I might lose a sense of self, depending on my role of course. Speaking from an extreme and considering all other aspects even moderate aspects of it, your relationships become more formal for one, which is good for society, but I mean you also want to make sure that you are personable, and I feel like the military kind of takes that away. So, in that sense, emotion is compressed because you travel a lot, family is not a factor. This carries throughout your time in the army and after.”*

Additionally, participants discussed their beliefs that certain freedoms associated with positive citizenship would be restricted through military participation:

*“I feel like the military will restrict me on having a diverse opinion because I will be surrounded around a lot of individuals who think a certain way. I feel like it wouldn’t be*

*a place where I could voice my opinion on certain things because I would not have a lot of supporters.”*

**Occupational wellness:** Subjects reported that soldering was not their only understanding of a military occupation, but their responses emphasized soldiering as the basis of the military and soldier readiness as the top military priority:

*“I feel like you’re always protecting something, always guarding something or always on guard. When I think of soldiering that’s what I think of. I feel like that mindset of always having to protect, whether it be someone as important as the president or something as simple as a room with important documents or just an important place for refugees, borders and what not you’re always protecting, guarding and defending something.”*

*“.... you could do graphic design, be an intelligence person, computer science and all but when s\*\*\* hits the fan you have to be ready to protect and defend.”*

Participants also expressed concerns related to capped financial salaries and pay based on rank, while acknowledging social benefits given to those who serve:

*“I want to be a surgeon, I know if I go to the military I’ll start at a fixed salary versus if I didn’t my salary would be more lucrative. The military set rates. No matter how good you are at the job you could only go so far.”*

*“I feel like being a part of the military, in America, is very beneficial, a resume booster. People really care individuals in the military, and they care about their veterans regardless of whatever else is on your resume. The fact that you served will put you above someone else if you qualify for the job.”*

**Physically wellness:** Subjects expressed that although they think the military develops physically fit soldiers, they also feel that individuals in the military are subject to secondary

health issues due to military lifestyle. These health issues may be detrimental to an individual's quality of life:

*"The training itself is very effective in shaping physically fit people, but as far as them being well other than physically, soldiers deal with alcoholism, substance abuse, mental dilemmas and sleep problems. These issues are way more important than just being in shape and being ready for battle."*

*"Suicide rates are high amongst soldiers, so I feel like they deal with life on a different level. You have to balance your job, family, and death. I think that's hard to cope with. The military provides resources to be physically fit, but I think they're failing in other areas, areas that are more detrimental to health."*

Subjects also brought up the idea that physical wellness could be affected by the environment in which one reside:

*"Constantly traveling to different time zones and different climates, some people react differently. Once you sustain that type of lifestyle it has its draw backs because of trauma, stress, overworking and never having the ability to settle down in one place for a long duration of time."*

**Social wellness:** Participants identified as having a sense of connection within their common groups, but emphasized their feelings of displacement within American society at large:

*"Right now I feel like I have a sense of belonging to my group as a minority and a black minority. Being a black male in America displaces me automatically in society. Finding a place to belong outside my group is hard because society makes belonging a process within itself."*

Subjects indicated that their place in society had affected their decision about whether or not to enlist:

*“I feel like I would only consider the military if I feel so displaced that I needed to belong to something. And that would be my last option because I would be representing something America, which is a great place, but is very political which means they do things that we don’t thoroughly support because they have to. I feel like for me to be this be this face and serve and press that on to others would be wrong to what I believe. That’s the reason the military would be my last option because I can’t represent something like that thoroughly.”*

*“I feel like America really doesn’t care about me, I don’t know why I would serve something that is supposed to be heroic and patriotic but can’t provide healthcare and education for free. That’s inadequate. It makes me feel very negative about the military. You want me to support you but not get the same support in return, sounds like an abusive relationship to me.”*

**Spiritual wellness:** Subjects expressed that the military would allow them to achieve a sense of solitude, self-reflection, spiritual growth and connection with nature. This sense of spiritual growth comes with the price of not growing around individuals you have connections with. Subjects voiced concerns about spiritual growth during times of turmoil:

*“From my experience of listening to people who were in the military, who actually deployed, they have a lot of free time. I feel like I would have a lot of thinking time as compared to my time now. I have a lot of distractions, I think military environments minimize distractions and improves focus.”*

*“That’s a real thing in the military from what I heard. There is a lot of isolation, most of the time having downtime with someone else or a similar group of people that can change how you view interactions with peaceful situations and nature. The issue is that you won’t have those opportunities with loved ones only random individuals you met*



*during your time serving. You can gain friends in the military but it's different at the end of the day."*

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

The guiding research question for this study focused on the relationship between manhood, community, and enlistment for African American men. Shifting agendas have been hypothesized to be among the top variables that are contributing to declining numbers for African American male participation in the US military. The hypothesis for this study assumed that targeted systematic obstructions demotivate and limit opportunity for black men. The hypothesis also assumed that wellness perceptions for African American men affect their decision-making processes.

This study utilized the wellness wheel as a foundational tool for predicting variables in order to assess African American male perceptions of quality of life among soldiers. Data gathered from this study suggests that African Americans exhibit distinctive attitudes about the military. These findings contradict a previous study (Leal, 2005) which concluded that African Americans do not exhibit distinctive attitudes towards the military. The findings in this study suggest that there is a relationship between perceived wellness, quality of life, and military involvement. Wellness itself may not be directly linked to the military, however, wellness is relevant to the decision-making process, including decisions about enlistment. Decision making processes are tailored towards the individual rather than the community. It can be inferred that given that there is little to be gained, the decision to serve is too risky for members of minority communities. It can also be inferred that the concept of needing to sacrifice for future generations is daunting and outdated.

The findings of this study support multiple variables that contribute to the issues of both identity and well and their effects on the process of decision making. Bridges' research shows that African American males need and seek greater awareness, self-understanding, and self-appreciation (Bridges, 2010). Self-awareness includes an understanding of who one is as an

individual African American, along with an understanding of African American history, both at the university and in American society at large (Bridges, 2010).

Strengths and Limitations:

This study was conducted at a well-known public university. The hypothesis was tested on young men who, by attending a university of this caliber, have defeated society's expectations and their statistical probability of doing so, and as such, these subjects view education as a key source of success. This means that the hypothesis was examined amongst the most educated of the African American male population. Examining the relationship between African American manhood and enlistment may produce dialogue of a perceived reality amongst college educated black men that is different to that of undereducated or uneducated black man. This data may give insight to future roles of black men in their communities as well as within society at large. This study serves as a testable hypothesis with which to collect data for broader research in the area(s) of African American manhood and military enlistment.

The use of focus group interviews may have caused reduced participation throughout the duration of the interview. The criteria for inclusion were biased towards those who attend college or university, and this study does not include African American males who may be in the labor market, trade school or high school. High school dropouts, college dropouts, and incarcerated black men were not accounted for. This study did not address sexual orientation.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between African American manhood and enlistment into today's military. This research aimed to study the benefits and disadvantages for black males relative to being either pro or anti-enlistment. This study also aimed to explore the roles of black males within their community and American society.

In order to collect more accurate data, studies are needed researching African Americans who do identify as either black male heterosexual, asexual and/or homosexual. Data concerning education, identity, and perception of enlisting into military service will need to be collected and compared. Another aspect that must be researched is the difference in opportunities available for heterosexual and non-heterosexual black males. This includes the labor market as compared to the military and education as compared to the labor market. Given these suggestions, future research should encompass black men without separation. In turn, this will provide more accurate descriptive data for analyzing. This will also provide avenues for researchers to examine the increasing barriers facing black men. Additional research will help limit biases based on the socialization of societal gender roles in decision making and perceptions versus quality of life.

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